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ABSTRACT

The risk of dying from fire increases substantially among older adults. This document contains a collection of fire safety information for elderly people. Information includes procedures to follow in case of fire and early warning technologies such as smoke alarms. The booklet describes potential sources of fires (smoking, home heating, kitchens, electrical hazards, home appliances, barbecue grills) and how the elderly person can reduce the risks of fires. Also presented are tips on developing a home fire-safety plan. (JE)

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Fire Safety for Retired Adults Participant's Coursebook

*For the National Fire Safety
Certification System
for the Elderly*

CG026209

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Fire Safety

for Retired Adults

and Their Families

Bonnie L. Walker, Ph.D.

Bonnie Walker & Associates, Inc. □ Crofton, Maryland 21114

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE

The long range goals of the National Fire Safety Certification System is to provide uniform, validated fire safety training to older Americans living independently in their homes and to reduce their high risk of fire death.

Funding for the development of the system came from the Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute on Aging, through a Small Business Innovation Research Grant award.

Guiding the project is a Focus Group made up of experts in the fields of fire safety, developmental disabilities, gerontology, training, and instructional design.

The complete system consists of four components:

- Twenty minute video,
- Twenty-four page booklet,
- Leader's guide, and
- Evaluation materials.

The Fire Safety Workshop for Retired Adults video, titled *The Need for Fire Safety*, covers topics of importance to older people living independently in the community or with family members.

The Fire Safety Workshop for Retired Adults was pilot tested in February 1991 at the Bowie Senior Center and the Belair Community Center in Bowie, Maryland.

THE RISK OF FIRE IS ALWAYS PRESENT.

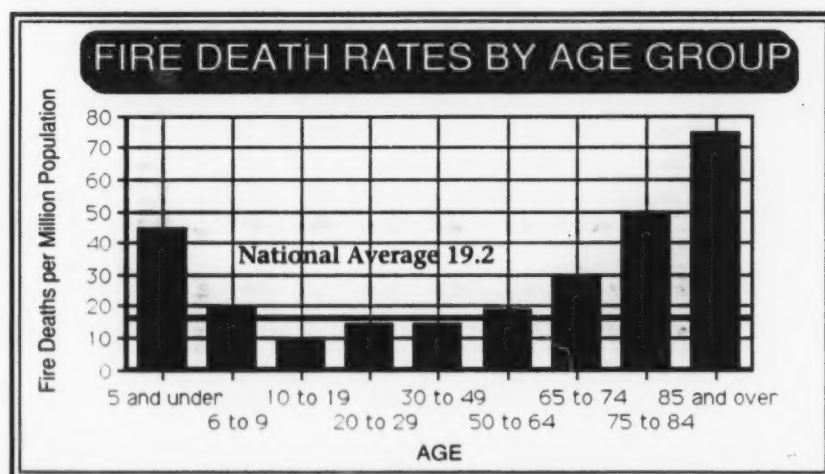
As we grow older, we are not all alike. In fact, we become more ourselves and less like other people.

Although we are different from each other, we do have some common needs and interests. One of these is the need for fire safety.

Consider these facts.

Age Group	Risk of fire death compared to the general population
-----------	---

65 to 74	Twice as likely.
75 to 84	Almost three times as likely.
85 and over	Almost four times as likely.



Fire death rates for older adults are higher than for the general population.

Major causes of home fire death for people age 65 and over

Smoking	Abandoned, discarded cigarettes, and cigars or falling asleep while smoking
Heating	Combustibles too close to portable heating units
Cooking	Combustibles and clothing too close to stove or cooking left unattended
Electrical	Ground faults, short circuits, broken wiring

A FIRE NEEDS THREE THINGS TO GROW.



You can reduce your chance of being a fire victim by increasing your knowledge of fire.

Fuel

Fuel is anything that will burn. Our homes contain many sources of fuel.

Ordinary Combustibles

- Paper
- Wood
- Cloth
- Furniture

Flammable Liquids

- Gasoline
- Kerosene
- Cooking oil
- Oil based paint

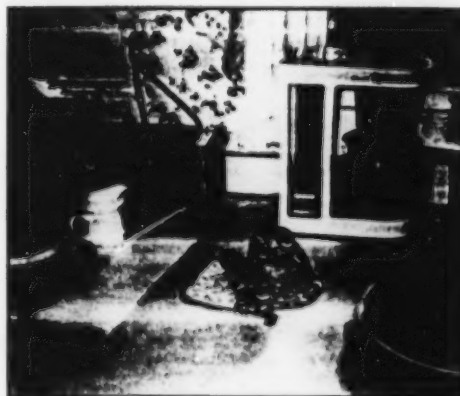
Electrical Equipment

- Appliances
- Outlets
- Fuse boxes

Heat

Fuel must be hot enough to burn. Keep fuel away from heat sources. Our homes contain many sources of heat.

- Stove and oven
- Clothes dryer
- Toaster
- Hair dryer
- Heating pad
- Curling iron
- Coffee pot
- Hot water heater
- Furnace
- Matches and lighters



During a fire, oxygen in the blood is replaced by carbon monoxide. High levels of carbon monoxide cause death.

Oxygen

A fire needs oxygen to burn. Oxygen is in the air all around us.

Portable oxygen cylinders contain pressurized oxygen which can speed up a fire's growth.



PUTTING OUT A FIRE

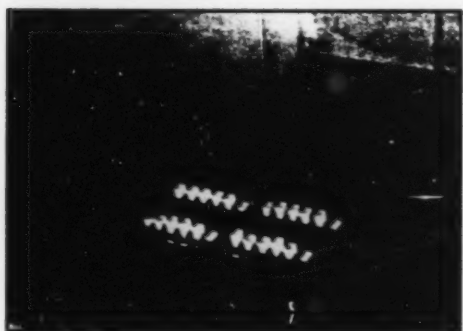
Take away the fuel.

Move the fuel away from the heat or turn off the fuel source. When all of the fuel is used up, the fire goes out.



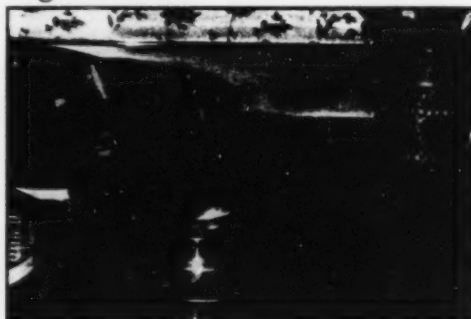
Take away the heat.

Fuel must be hot enough to burn. Removing the heat source or cooling the fuel puts the fire out. Turning off the burner removes the heat source.



Take away the oxygen.

Smothering a fire removes the oxygen supply needed to keep the fire going. When grease in a pan catches on fire, covering the pan with a lid prevents oxygen from getting to the fire. When most of the oxygen is used up, the fire goes out.



*Use portable
oxygen
carefully.
Make sure no
one smokes
near
pressurized
oxygen
cylinders and
periodically
test your
equipment for
leaks.*

NEVER RUN IF YOUR CLOTHING CATCHES ON FIRE.

If your clothes catch on fire, it is important to stop, drop, and roll. Rolling smothers the fire. Running will fan the fire, making it worse.



Stop

Stop where you are.
Do not run.



Drop

Drop quickly to the floor.



Roll

Cover your face with your hands.
Roll around until the fire is out.

SMOKE IS OFTEN THE MOST DANGEROUS ELEMENT OF FIRE.



A closed bedroom door delays the spread of smoke.

Smoke is a mixture of hot vapors, poisonous gases, and fuel particles that is produced when materials burn. Most people die in fires because they breathe too much smoke.

Smoke moves through a house much faster than flames and heat. It rises to the highest level possible. Smoke on the first floor will quickly travel up the stairs and fill the upper levels of a house.

Tips to reduce smoke exposure

- Sleep with your bedroom door shut.
- Install and maintain smoke detectors.
- If a fire is discovered, close the door to the fire area to reduce smoke movement.
- Stay low under the smoke while evacuating.



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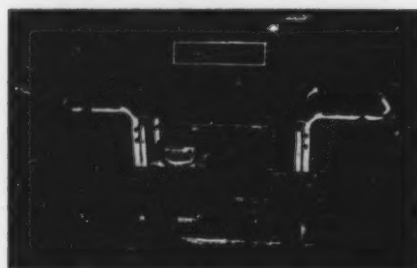
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BARBECUE GRILLS CAN CAUSE SERIOUS BURNS.

Tips for barbecuing safely

- Read the manual that came with your barbecue grill.
- Carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions for turning on, lighting, and turning off the grill.
- If you are using a gas grill, light the grill immediately after turning the gas on. If you let the gas build up, it could explode when you ignite the grill.
- If you are using a charcoal grill, do not spray additional lighter fluid onto hot coals. A flame could travel up the stream of lighter fluid and set your clothes on fire.
- Do not leave a grill unattended when the gas is on or the coals are hot.
- Never use a portable barbecue grill to finish cooking inside during bad weather conditions.
- Never use a barbecue grill in a garage, basement, covered patio, or on an apartment balcony.

Portable barbecue grills used inside or too close to buildings can produce deadly heat and fumes.



EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE A FIRE EMERGENCY PLAN.

Make a plan.

- Sit down with everyone who lives in your house and develop a fire emergency plan.
- Go to each room in the house and plan two ways out of every room.
- Be sure all windows open and close easily.
- Set a meeting place where everyone will meet after they evacuate from the house.
- Have a fire drill at least twice a year. Everyone who lives in the house and any guests should participate.
- Practice getting out within three minutes.

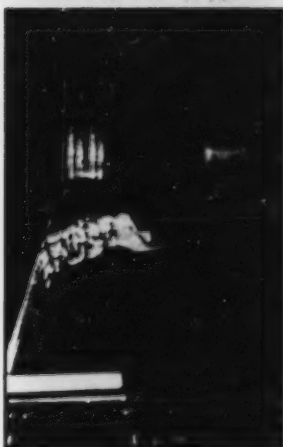
THINK ABOUT EVERYONE'S SPECIAL NEEDS.



If anyone has a mobility, visual, or hearing impairment, consider these needs when developing your fire emergency plan.

- People with a mobility impairment should sleep on the ground floor.
- People with a visual impairment should keep their glasses and other assistive devices beside their bed at night.
- People with special needs should keep a phone by the bed.
- If someone has a hearing impairment, install smoke detectors with flashing lights or detectors that warn of smoke by vibrating the bed. Test these devices to be sure they will awaken the person at night.
- Register with the fire department so they will have advance notice that someone in your home may need special help in a fire.

MAKE SURE THE WAY OUT IS CLEAR.



There are many hazards that can prevent or hamper your attempt to leave your home in a fire emergency. Hazards can be located in rooms, corridors, stairs, doorways, and outside the home.

- Outside pathways that are poorly maintained or covered with ice in the winter present a hazard to safe exiting.
- Properly dispose of refuse both inside and outside the home.
- Never block doors, stairs, corridors, or other pathways with furniture or other items.
- Key operated deadbolt locks can prevent occupants from getting out during a fire emergency, when smoke impairs vision and people become disoriented. A deadbolt with a turn knob on the inside is a better alternative for fire safety.

MOST FIRE DEATHS OCCUR AT NIGHT WHILE PEOPLE ARE SLEEPING.

If you are awakened by the smoke detector, feel the door knob with the back of your hand to see if it is hot. If it's hot, leave the door shut and use the second way out.

In the event you are trapped

- Call the fire department.
- Stuff sheets under the door to keep the smoke from coming into your room.
- Close the heating and air conditioning vents.
- Wait by the window to be rescued.

If the door knob is not hot

- Open the door slowly and check the hallway for fire and smoke.
- Evacuate the house quickly.
- Take your pets with you when you leave.
- Go to the meeting place.
- Call the fire department from the neighbor's house.
- Recognize the danger in fighting the fire.
- Remember that time is your enemy.

Many people are very attached to their pets. Include them in your fire emergency planning.



FIRE HAZARD MONTHLY CHECKLIST



Use this list to do a preventative maintenance check of your house.
Plan corrective action for any item that you answer NO.

YES	NO	Do you do the following?
☐	☐	1. Do you fully extinguish smoking materials and wet them down before disposal?
☐	☐	2. Do you empty your ashtrays every night?
☐	☐	3. Do you watch your cooking at all times?
☐	☐	4. Are your kitchen counters kept free of clutter?
☐	☐	5. Do you use extension cords only on a temporary basis?
☐	☐	6. Is no more than one major appliance plugged into any outlet?
☐	☐	7. Are all of your electrical cords in good condition?
☐	☐	8. Do all appliances have a tag from a recognized testing laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL)?
☐	☐	9. Do you use fire retardant decorations during holidays?
☐	☐	10. Do you unplug appliances after use (especially hair dryers, curling irons, coffee pots, blenders, irons, and toasters)?
☐	☐	11. Do you have a special area for ironing?
☐	☐	12. Do you store flammable cleaning fluids in a detached garage or storage shed?
☐	☐	13. Are your storage areas (garage, sheds) orderly and free of litter?
☐	☐	14. Do you keep soiled cleaning rags in a closed metal container?
☐	☐	15. Is the firescreen in place when you use the fireplace?
☐	☐	16. Do you have your chimney cleaned once a year?
☐	☐	17. Do you store the wood for the fireplace outside or in small amounts away from the fireplace?
☐	☐	18. Are work areas left in a safe manner after each use?
☐	☐	19. Do you take your trash outside on a regular basis?
☐	☐	20. Do you keep combustibles away from the furnace, hot water heater, or portable heaters?
☐	☐	21. Do you use comforters instead of electric blankets?
☐	☐	22. Do you clean the lint out of your clothes dryer after each use?
☐	☐	23. Have your fire safety devices been tested in accordance with manufacturer's instructions?
☐	☐	24. Do your windows open and close easily from the inside?
☐	☐	25. Do you have slippers and a bathrobe near your bed?

THE MOST COMMON PLACE FOR A FIRE TO START IS IN THE KITCHEN.

Tips to prevent kitchen fires

- Never leave your cooking unattended.
- Wear close fitting clothes when cooking.
- Use equipment specially made for deep frying.
- Keep the kitchen counter and stove area free from clutter to prevent combustibles from being accidentally placed too close to the stove.
- Clean the stove and oven regularly.
- Turn the stove and oven off after use.
- Turn the stove and oven off during a power failure.
- Unplug heat producing appliances when not in use.



Cooking is a leading cause of fire injury among older adults.

ELECTRICAL HAZARDS ARE COMMON IN OLDER HOMES.

Tips to prevent electrical fires

- Do not use extension cords for permanent purposes.
- Do not run cords under rugs or furniture.
- Do not staple cords to walls or baseboards.
- Always grasp the plug to remove it from the socket; never pull the cord.
- Electrical fires often spread behind walls. Never attempt to extinguish these fires yourself. Call the fire department from a neighbor's house.

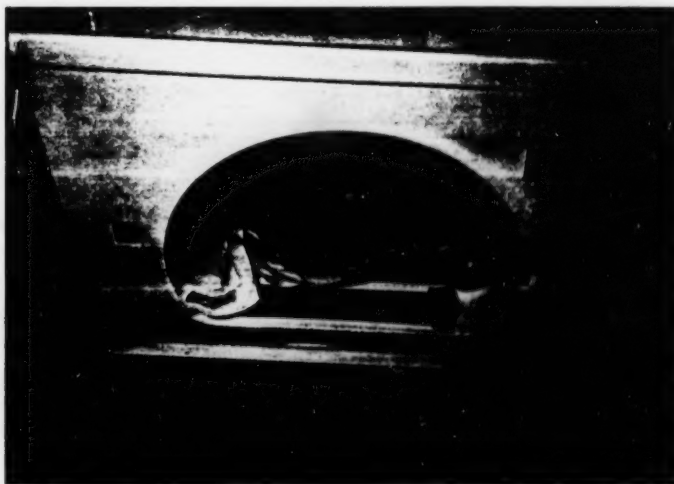


If an electrical plug is hot, it could be a signal of an electrical problem.

APPLIANCES PRODUCE HEAT THAT CAN START FIRES.

Tips to prevent appliance fires

- Turn off and unplug appliances after use.
- Clean the lint out of the clothes dryer after each use.
- Designate a specific area to use potentially hazardous appliances such as irons, hair dryers, and curling irons. Unplug them after use.
- Check appliances to be sure they operate correctly.
- Throw away or have professionally repaired any
- Check appliance cords to be sure they are not frayed.
- Never repair appliance cords by putting tape over the wires.
- Be sure all appliances are listed by an authorized testing agency such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL).
- Unplug an appliance that repeatedly trips the breaker. Then call an electrician.
- Unplug an appliance that causes the plug or socket to become hot. Then call an electrician.



If the lint in a dryer gets hot enough, it can start a fire.

HEATING PADS AND ELECTRIC BLANKETS CAN START FIRES.

Tips to prevent heating pad and electric blanket fires

- Do not use heating pads while you are sleeping.
- Do NOT tuck electric blankets under mattresses.
- Use comforters and extra blankets instead of electric blankets.
- Use heating pads and electric blankets at as low a temperature setting as possible.
- Always unplug them after use.
- Check the cords for frays.
- Follow the manufacturer's washing instructions.
- Do not leave them unattended when they are turned on.

Heating pads and electric blankets heat up anything that is near them. If nearby materials get hot enough, they can catch on fire.



HOLIDAY SAFETY IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER.

As the holiday season approaches, the risk of fire increases as well. Residential fires are more likely to occur in December and January than in other months of the year.

However, there are many ways to reduce the risk of fire in our homes during the holiday season. The following tips will help keep your home safer.

Tips to prevent fires during the holiday season

- Keep decorations away from sources of heat. For example, be sure that decorations on a tree are not resting against a tree light.
- Only buy lights that are listed by a recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL).



HOLIDAY SAFETY DO'S AND DON'TS



- Do NOT use light sets with cracked or broken sockets or frayed cords.
- Do not overload extension cords or light strings.
- Do not connect large lamp sets to miniature light sets.
- Be sure all lights are off when you leave the house or go to bed. Unplug the lights from the wall outlet.
- Do not leave lit wax candles unattended.
- Keep all combustibles away from lit candles.
- Never use candles to decorate a tree.
- Use electric candles in place of wax candles.
- Cut at least 1/2 inch off the base of live trees and water them daily.
- Place the tree away from heat sources.
- Remove the tree promptly before it dries out and NEVER burn any part of the tree in a wood stove or fireplace.
- If you buy an artificial tree, make sure it is fire retardant.

STORAGE AREAS CAN BE A FIRE HAZARD.



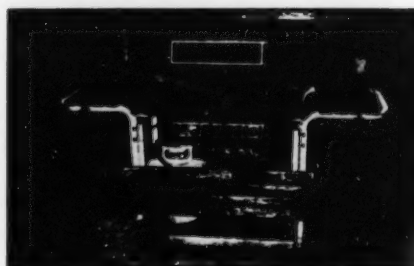
- Never store flammable liquids and gases, such as gasoline, cleaning supplies, and benzene, near soiled rags, linen, or other flammable material.
- Always store flammable liquids and gases in approved safety containers that are clearly labeled.
- Store used cleaning rags in a closed metal container. Improperly stored rags can spontaneously combust.
- Clean up untidy storage closets, workrooms, or laundry rooms.
- Do not allow trash and litter to build up in closets and storage areas.
- Eliminate unnecessary heat sources in and near storage areas.

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Tips for barbecuing safely

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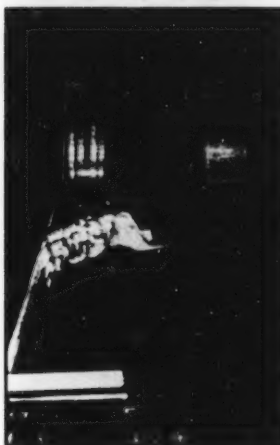
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- Properly dispose of refuse both inside and outside the home.
- Never block doors, stairs, corridors, or other pathways with furniture or other items.
- Key operated deadbolt locks can prevent occupants from getting out during a fire emergency, when smoke impairs vision and people become disoriented. A deadbolt with a turn knob on the inside is a better alternative for fire safety.

MOST FIRE DEATHS OCCUR AT NIGHT WHILE PEOPLE ARE SLEEPING.

If you are awakened by the smoke detector, feel the door knob with the back of your hand to see if it is hot. If it's hot, leave the door shut and use the second way out.

In the event you are trapped

- Call the fire department.
- Stuff sheets under the door to keep the smoke from coming into your room.
- Close the heating and air conditioning vents.
- Wait by the window to be rescued.

If the door knob is not hot

- Open the door slowly and check the hallway for fire and smoke.
- Evacuate the house quickly.
- Take your pets with you when you leave.
- Go to the meeting place.
- Call the fire department from the neighbor's house.
- Recognize the danger in fighting the fire.
- Remember that time is your enemy.

Many people are very attached to their pets. Include them in your fire emergency planning.



FIRE HAZARD MONTHLY CHECKLIST



*Use this list to do a preventative maintenance check of your house.
Plan corrective action for any item that you answer NO.*

YES	NO	Do you do the following?
☐	☐	1. Do you fully extinguish smoking materials and wet them down before disposal?
☐	☐	2. Do you empty your ashtrays every night?
☐	☐	3. Do you watch your cooking at all times?
☐	☐	4. Are your kitchen counters kept free of clutter?
☐	☐	5. Do you use extension cords only on a temporary basis?
☐	☐	6. Is no more than one major appliance plugged into any outlet?
☐	☐	7. Are all of your electrical cords in good condition?
☐	☐	8. Do all appliances have a tag from a recognized testing laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL)?
☐	☐	9. Do you use fire retardant decorations during holidays?
☐	☐	10. Do you unplug appliances after use (especially hair dryers, curling irons, coffee pots, blenders, irons, and toasters)?
☐	☐	11. Do you have a special area for ironing?
☐	☐	12. Do you store flammable cleaning fluids in a detached garage or storage shed?
☐	☐	13. Are your storage areas (garage, sheds) orderly and free of litter?
☐	☐	14. Do you keep soiled cleaning rags in a closed metal container?
☐	☐	15. Is the firescreen in place when you use the fireplace?
☐	☐	16. Do you have your chimney cleaned once a year?
☐	☐	17. Do you store the wood for the fireplace outside or in small amounts away from the fireplace?
☐	☐	18. Are work areas left in a safe manner after each use?
☐	☐	19. Do you take your trash outside on a regular basis?
☐	☐	20. Do you keep combustibles away from the furnace, hot water heater, or portable heaters?
☐	☐	21. Do you use comforters instead of electric blankets?
☐	☐	22. Do you clean the lint out of your clothes dryer after each use?
☐	☐	23. Have your fire safety devices been tested in accordance with manufacturer's instructions?
☐	☐	24. Do your windows open and close easily from the inside?
☐	☐	25. Do you have slippers and a bathrobe near your bed?



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